

DID XANADU DERIVE FROM XAMDU OR XAINDU?

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*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea...*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's nonce-spelling XANNADU appears in the Crewe manuscript for "Kubla Khan, or a Fragment in a Dream" (T.C. Skeat, *British Museum Quarterly* 26 (1963), pp 77-83). Corrected or respelled XANADU in the printed version in 1816, this deserves a bit more etymological, linguistic consideration. The initial question is this: did it derive from *Purchas His Pilgrimage* alone, Coleridge having admitted the influence of this 1613-14 travel book, or from *Purchas* in combination with Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("Cambalu, seat of Cathaian Can..."[XI. 388]), as J.B. Beer has claimed in *Coleridge the Visionary* (London 1959) I, 216? If the latter, was the word in *Purchas* XAMDU as Beer proposes, or rather XAINDU as in the first and second editions of the *Pilgrimage*, the leading source?

Although the *Purchas*-Milton combination would appeal (Coleridge being indebted enough here to the Miltonic epic, as is well recognized now), the spelling in the earlier editions does seem more relevant. For the poet's usage of *Purchas* would involve little more than simple juxtaposition at the time that this name was finally transformed and turned into XANADU. The second vowel in XAINDU could then well have been half-consciously transposed, along with the consonant following, with the final effect being that it was reduced to what would now be linguistically labeled a "schwa" sound. Comparable enough is the proposition that the final spelling combines the Alph(a) effect (as thus also with the name of "the sacred river") with that of the Omega effect insofar as XANADU happens to contain letters from the beginning and toward the end of the Greek and Ethiopian alphabets, no less, suggesting likewise an obvious hidden allusion to the Alph(eus) river in Greece but then along with one to the unusual Ethiopian setting ("an Abyssinian maid"), which concludes the dream-vision in a section purportedly added later. Or is it not subliminal name-play on "X: what can I do?"—another Road to Xanadu.

For further exemplification of this nomenclatural matter, see my *Sources, Meaning, and Influences of Coleridge's Kubla Khan: Xanadu Re-Routed. A Study in the Ways of Romantic Variety* (Lewiston, New York, and Lampeter, Wales, 2000), especially the major section entitled An Annotated Xanadu, pp 5-6.